



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE ENGLISH NOVEL IN THE TIME OF ELIZABETH.

The importance of those forms of prose fiction that were current during the Elizabethan age, has been very generally underestimated. Almost every writer who has discussed this phase of our literature has entirely ignored all but Sidney's novel and that of Lyly, or has dismissed the subject with the implication that it is without significance. The attitude of the reading public at large is, no doubt, very much the same as that of Henry Hallam, who, in his "Literature of Europe," though admitting that his knowledge of the prose fiction of the time was extremely limited, spoke of "such efforts of wit and satire as came from Greene, Nash, and other worthies of our early stage" as being "low, and, with very few exceptions, very stupid ribaldry." Within recent years, however, owing to the labors of such critics as Dr. Grosart and Mr. Gosse, very many of the Elizabethan novels, hitherto almost inaccessible, have been reprinted and an increased interest in this important period has been aroused.

Without doubt, the great mass of the stories current in the latter half of the sixteenth century, with some few exceptions, possess very little literary merit as judged by the more strict criteria of modern taste. Yet the popularity many of them enjoyed in their day would lead us to believe, even if we had no other evidence, that their influence upon the times and upon succeeding writers was very great. It is a mistake to trace the source of our modern novel to Defoe, or to Richardson, and to lose sight of their forerunners. If we seek for the beginnings of the English novel in the works of Lyly and of Sidney, or of even earlier writers, and regard the evolution of the art of narration as an unbroken chain from decade to decade, the importance of those links which immediately precede the

work of Richardson and his contemporaries will become evident.

To form a just estimate of the historical value of this literature, and to appreciate clearly how very meagre was the material at the disposal of the Elizabethan novelists, it is necessary to review briefly the development of the art of prose fiction previous to the middle of the sixteenth century. One of the most remarkable features in the history of this art is its late appearance. Verse had been developed to a very high degree of perfection before prose forms in literature arose. If we except Xenophon, or whoever may have been the author of the "Cyropædia," and a few others whose names only have come down to us, we find that it was not until the epic, lyric, and dramatic eras had closed that Greek fictitious prose narrative came into existence, in the third century, in the writings of Heliodorus, Achilles Tatius, and Longus. Among the Romans, prose fiction appeared a century earlier in the "Satyricon" of Petronius Arbiter, and the "Golden Ass" of Apuleius, but this was not until the cycle of the greater Roman classics had closed. And in the modern period, notwithstanding these earlier models, this form of literature was equally slow in developing. In the early part of the Middle Ages nothing of the kind existed except the "Arabian Nights" and the legendary "Lives of the Saints."

The novel, indeed, as we now understand the term, appeared only after those languages which had felt the influence of the Latin, had had time to develop an individuality of their own. The great demand for narrative which existed previously throughout feudal Europe had been met, almost exclusively, by verse. The wandering bards, as they travelled from court to court, or from castle to castle, wove into verse and sang to the sound of their rude instruments, stories drawn from all sources. Tales from classic literature or from the East, tales of mediæval heroes and saints, were alike clothed in the garb of chivalry and cast into metrical form.

But gradually, in Italy, a new state of things was emerging. Through the influence of the Crusades and the advantageous position of the country, a rich and leisured merchant class had developed. After the grand epic of Dante and the passionate lyrics of Petrarch, came a demand for a new type of literature, which was met by the "Decameron" of Boccaccio. From these short novels, drawn from all sources and reshaped by the skill of a master-hand, may be dated the beginning of modern European prose fiction. For more than a century fictitious prose narrative was modelled, almost exclusively, on Boccaccio's masterpiece, nor during the centuries which divide our age from his, although other forms have gradually developed, has Boccaccio's influence upon literature waned. In France, as in Italy, stories of this type multiplied. But in the early part of the sixteenth century two new types of fiction were added to that already existing, the *fiction of satiric humor* by Rabelais, in France, and the *pastoral romance* by Sannazzaro, in Italy. The former had little influence until a date later than the Elizabethan age. The "Arcadia" of Sannazzaro, however, must be kept in mind, since it was the earliest example, the "Ameto," of Boccaccio, hardly belonging to this class, of the pastoral romance in modern literature, and it exercised a very great influence upon later writers both on the Continent and in England.

In Spain, the wars of the Goths and Moors furnished abundant material for fiction. Many of the mediæval legends took the form of verse, but gradually, as in surrounding countries, a prose literature developed. One of the most important of the earlier romances, and one which may be taken as representative of a very large part of the preceding century, was "Amadis de Gaul," a romance of knight errantry by Vasco Lobeyra. Later, the "Pastoral Romance," already known in Italy, and believed to have been originally of Portuguese origin, begins in Spain, with the "Diana" of Montemayor, in the first half of the sixteenth century (1545). "The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes," by

Diego Mendoza, is representative of a third and more original type of Spanish prose fiction, and was published about the same time (1553). This was the first of the so-called *picaresque* novels, or novels of clever roguery. Like Montemayor, Mendoza found many imitators.

In England, very little prose fiction of any moment existed previous to Elizabeth's reign. The early literature of England, like that of other countries, abounded in metrical romances. These were largely translations of French romances of chivalry, especially those relating to the Welsh hero, King Arthur. Mallory gathered together the floating tales which form the body of Arthurian romance, into his prose "Morte d'Arthur, or History of King Arthur and of the Knights of the Round Table," and the influence of this book upon English literature of later periods than the Elizabethan, is well known. To this was added, in 1516, "Utopia," a political allegory in prose by Sir Thomas More.

The increased interest in literature which characterized the Elizabethan period was directed, not only toward the drama, but also toward prose narrative. The cause is not far to seek. This was a time of great prosperity for England, both at home and abroad, and, as had happened earlier in Italy, a leisured class was springing up which desired amusement. The Queen set the example to her subjects and to the ladies of the court, and literature that, unlike the drama, could be enjoyed in the privacy of the boudoir, became the fashion. So, the demand for prose literature steadily increased during and after Elizabeth's reign, and, in consequence, novel writing becoming profitable financially, the quality of the prose steadily improved, until, in the reign of Queen Anne and her successors, we find the masterpieces of such men as Defoe and Richardson. It must be remembered, however, that the drama continued to be the main occupation of the best literary talent, and that the writing of prose tales was altogether subsidiary. The greatest minds, indeed, such as Shakspeare and Ben Jonson,

neglected it altogether. It was unfortunate for the quality of the resulting literature that it was largely those writers who were least successful in the department of the drama who turned to prose. Yet, it is in these productions that we must seek the beginnings of the English novel of to-day.

Let us consider, then, somewhat in detail, a few of the more characteristic prose works of this period. The first significant literary event in the reign of Elizabeth was the translation, in 1566, of a portion of the Decameron. In this very year the earliest and best known of the collections of stories from foreign sources,¹ "Paynter's Palace of Pleasures" appeared. It contained histories from Boccaccio, Bandello, Sir Giovanni Fiorentino, the Spanish Guevara, the Queen of Navarre "and other italian and french authors." The volume may well be taken as typical. The histories are the ordinary short novels of adventure and gallantry, such as were popular during the Renaissance. Many of them are coarse and licentious, and it was probably Paynter's book which first roused the indignation of Roger Ascham and his colleagues against the introduction of what they termed "Italian immorality." But the stories were well told, and such collections were widely read in their day. They furnished to the active minds of Elizabethan writers most valuable material for dramatic composition, and served also as models for a multitude of original stories.

In 1578, after an interval of twelve years, barren of original prose, appeared a work whose influence upon succeeding literature can hardly be over-estimated. This was John Lyly's "Euphues," practically the first "novel of manners"

¹ Some of the later collections of the same character are: 1567, "Tragicall Discourses," by George Fenton; 1571, "Foreste, or Collection of Histories," by T. Fortescue; 1576, "Pettie Palace of Pettie, his Pleasures," by George Pettie; 1577, "Strange and Tragicall Histories Translated Out of French," by Robert Smyth; 1582, "Heptameron of Civill Discourses," by G. Whetstone; 1584, "Farewell to Military Profession," by Barnabe Rich; 1607, a translation by E. Grimstone, of the "Admirable and Memorable Histories of Goulard."

in England. Its author was a scholar, who was, perhaps, familiar with contemporary French and Spanish literature. Certainly his story seems to have been somewhat influenced in respect to its matter by the popular *picaresque* novel.

Euphues is a young scholar of Athens, "of more wit then wealth and yet of more wealth then wisdom," who, setting off on his travels, comes to Naples, "a place of more pleasure then profit, and yet of more profit then pietie." He enters at once into the evil life of the city and soon forms a friendship with a young man of some property, called Philautus. Philautus was in love with Lucilla, daughter of Don Ferardo. "Unto hir," says Lyly, "had Philautus accesse, who won her by right of love, and should have worn her by right of law, had not Euphues, by straunge destenie, broken the bondes of marriage and forbidden the banes of matrimony." It is upon this deceitful betrayal of Philautus by his friend, Euphues, that the interest of the story hangs. Not to go into its details, suffice it to say that Euphues is himself at last rejected by the fickle Lucilla, who transfers her affections to one Curio, of Naples. Euphues and Philautus promptly re-cement their friendship, shattered by the conduct of the former, and Euphues relieves his feelings by writing a rather tiresome letter, entitled "A Cooling Card for Philautus and all Fond Lovers," after which the matter ends.

On examining this tale, we may see how very slight and simple is its texture. It is told by Lyly merely in outline, with extremely little detail, and yet it fills over one hundred pages in Arber's Reprint, the space being occupied chiefly by the long speeches of the characters and by their still more drawn out soliloquies and meditations. The peculiar style in which the book is written tends, of itself, to great verbosity, and the author leaves no opportunity for a monologue unimproved. On the other hand the story, such as it is, is told directly and simply. It is easily followed, and progresses steadily from beginning to end. This great simplicity and freedom from detail, is possibly due to the

fact that Lyly was, above all, a dramatist and not a novelist. The tale is such as he might very easily have used as the basis of a play, and possibly he intended at first so to use it. If this be the case, in changing it to the prose form, he did not so far change his method as to add the picturesque details essential to truly artistic fiction.

The interest of the story rests, not so much upon the incidents as upon the play of feeling in the minds of the characters. But, though there is an evident attempt at it, Lyly does not succeed in making any close psychological analysis. The meditations of the actors in the little drama are introduced in the most naïvely simple manner. This and other like characteristics are evidences that the art of story-telling in Lyly's time and country was still in its infancy. Such formal dissection of motives and of emotions as we find in his work, though it evinces a laudable desire on the part of the author, is a very primitive method of depicting character. The immense popularity, however, of the book amongst Lyly's contemporaries, a popularity shown both by the number of his imitators and by the many complimentary references to him in contemporary literature, induces us to infer that its artistic excellence was fully as high as was the literary taste of its readers.

One other characteristic of Lyly deserves attention. The very evident moral purpose which he intrudes greatly mars the effect of his narrative. As the art of fiction has progressed since Lyly's time, if it has not tended toward "art for art's sake," it has, at least, rapidly neared the point where the use of fiction as a mere vehicle of moral maxims is viewed askance. If we must have a moral in our modern novels, we insist that it be sugar-coated, and not be offered to us, as Lyly offers it, in all its nakedness. To censure Lyly, however, for the way in which his moral obtrudes itself, would be, perhaps, to judge him too much from the point of view of modern taste.

In 1593, seven years after the author's death, Sir Philip Sidney's "Arcadia" was issued from the press, but since

it was begun in 1580, two years after the publication of Lyly's "Euphues," and was largely influenced by that book, it is convenient to speak of it here. Sidney's, however, was an original mind, and the "Arcadia" is very far indeed from being an imitation of "Euphues." In the first place, Sidney wrote merely because he enjoyed it—because he had something in his mind that must out, and his book is free from the evident moral purpose which pervades that of Lyly. "In sum," he says in his preface, "a young head, not so well stayed as I would it were, and shall be when God will, having many, many fancies begotten in it, if it had not been in some way delivered, would have grown a monster, and more sorry might I be that they came in than that they got out."

Here, obviously is a story infinitely more intricate and complex than is that of the "Euphues." And yet the central tale of the "Arcadia" is sufficiently simple. The excrescences, the superadded incidents, give the book its almost tedious length. All the more important incidents point toward the fulfilment of the prophecy of an oracle to King Basilius :

"Thy elder care shall from thy careful face,
By princely means be stol'n and yet not lost;
Thy younger shall with nature's bliss embrace
An uncouth love, which nature hateth most.
Both they themselves unto such two shall wed
Who at thy bier, as at a bar, shall plead
Why thee, a living man, they had made dead.
In thine own seat a foreign state shall sit;
And ere that all these blows thy head do hit
Thou with thy wife adultery shalt commit."

Here is the keynote of all that follows. The feeling of confusion with which we leave the book, comes partly from the frequent change of name and disguise on the part of two friends, and partly from the exuberance of Sidney's imagination, which delights in introducing chivalric episodes unnecessary to the development of the main plot. The capture of the sisters by Cecropia and the wonderful encounters be-

tween the Arcadian Knights which result from it, though in themselves interesting, together form an episode which might be taken bodily from the book with advantage to its unity. And yet, notwithstanding his rambling method, lack of plot and unity cannot be laid at Sidney's door in anything like the degree in which it may be attributed to Cervantes or to the author of "*Gil Blas*," The occasional confusion of pronouns which results from the identity of the female *Zelmane* with *Pyrocles*, and other inaccuracies, shows furthermore how hurriedly the story was written. Had Sidney revised his work, as he undoubtedly would have done had he designed to publish the tale, many of the incidents and confusing changes of personality would probably have been discarded, and the "*Arcadia*" would now be given a much higher rank amongst works of fiction. Sidney, too, like *Lyly*, is utterly innocent of any attempt to preserve historical or geographical accuracy. *Arcadia* is evidently chosen because it is a distant, vaguely known, and therefore, romantic spot where anything might happen that might enter into the imagination of the writer. We find this Grecian State peopled with knights in mediæval armor, and bristling with high castles and fortifications, while the warriors disguise themselves on occasions "like the poorest sort of people in *Arcadia*, having no banner, but bloody shirts hanging upon long staves, with some bad bagpipes instead of drum and fife."

In conclusion, we find here, in the tale of this "warbler of poetic prose," the same long and formally introduced meditations that we found in *Lyly*. All the strong effects that Sidney obtained, he got, not from a thorough knowledge of the methods of story-telling, but in spite of his ignorance of them. He was not, in any sense, a conscious artist. But this does not mean that he was unskilful. The testimony of his contemporaries proves that his admirers were many in his day. Nor has he ceased to please. "The noble images, passions, sentiments, and poetical delicacies of character, scattered all over the '*Arcadia*,'" says Charles

Lamb, "justify the character which his contemporaries have left us of the writer."

Five years after John Lyly's first appearance in literature appeared the first prose fiction of a very voluminous and popular writer, Robert Greene. This was "Mamillia, a Looking-Glass for the Ladies of England" (1583). As is the case with almost all Elizabethan fiction, the scene of this novel is not laid in England. In 1580, Greene had journeyed through the south of Europe to Italy, and the scene of his novel is laid in Padua. But he makes little attempt to preserve local coloring, and plainly imitates Lyly's "Euphues." His whole method is the same, nor is the story itself very different. In "Mamillia" it is the man, Pharicles, who, like Lucilla, is capricious in love, and instead of a man's winning the affections of his friend's betrothed, as in Lyly's tale, it is a woman, Julia, who steals the affections of the lover of her friend, Mamillia. The likeness is still greater in that Livia, like Euphues, at last reforms and entirely withdraws from the society of the other sex. In matters of detail, also, the story resembles that of Lyly. Greene even reproduces the formal discussions on the nature of love characteristic of "Euphues." Thus, his first novel was anything but original. The story is in itself short, but, like its prototype, it is drawn out to a tedious length by long soliloquies and stilted conversations. It is destitute, too, of any valuable character drawing. Lastly, as though to cut himself off from the possibility of originality, Greene follows his master as closely as may be, in point of style.

Another characteristic work of Greene is "Perimedes, the Blacksmith." It is a collection of three stories, connected by the moral discourses and exhortations of Perimedes and his wife. Each night these two worthies amuse one another with some story illustrative of the particular moral precepts which are the subjects of that night's conversation. The stories are thus connected somewhat in Boccaccio's manner. There is nothing remarkable about

them. They are not particularly well told and are marred by the usual Euphuism.

Later in life Greene wrote another imitation or continuation of "Euphues," entitled "Menaphon, Camilla's Alarm to Slumbering Euphues." The story, both in plot and method of treatment, resembles the "Arcadia" of Sidney to a remarkable degree. Sidney had begun to write his romance nine years before, in 1580, but it was not published until 1593. It is possible that Greene, among others, had seen the "loose sheets" of the "Arcadia" and had utilized Sidney's plot. If this be not the case, then we must refer both tales to a common source. Like Sidney's story, this novel of Greene's is lacking in point of form, for so many characters are concerned that it is frequently necessary to interrupt the story of one group to relate the contemporary history of another. The same scene is chosen by both authors, and, as in the "Arcadia," the various characters in "Menaphon" assume disguises and false names, and so create complications, while, as though to complete the resemblance, the *motif* is the same in both novels, the gradual fulfilment of an obscure prophecy by Apollo. But "Menaphon" falls very far short of the power which distinguishes the "Arcadia." No attempt is made, such as we find in Sidney's novel, to depict character, nor do we find such power as Sidney's for description and narrative. There are, indeed, some very beautiful lyrics and eclogues, but these do not form a part of the narrative proper. In the lameness of the conclusion, too, the inferiority of Greene's art is plainly seen, for whereas the fulfilment of the prophecy in the "Arcadia" is evident to every reader as soon as the end is reached, Greene finds it necessary to make a fairy descend from the heavens to explain the symbolic meaning of the prophecy to the assembled crowd and, to draw their attention to the fact, unrecognized by them, that it is already fulfilled by the existing conditions.

In the year following the publication of the first novel of Greene (1584), appeared "The Delectable History of For-

bonius and Prisceria," by Thomas Lodge, another of the Elizabethan dramatists. This is, in some respects, one of the best stories of the period. The scene is arbitrarily laid in Memphis. Forbonius, a noble gentleman of that city, and Prisceria, daughter of Solduvius, the viceroy of the adjoining province, were, the story goes, in love. Solduvius, however, disliked Forbonius and was unwilling to receive him as a son-in-law. The two lovers were in despair. Forbonius consulted a "gymnosophist," who, having calculated the young man's nativity, warned him, at great length, against the evils and misfortunes of love, but gave him a mirror, the properties of which, in the words of the gymnosophist, were as follows: "In this myerour thou maist. after thou hast written thy minde, taking the sunnebeame, send the reflection to thy mistresse eye, whereby she may as leageably read thy letters, as if they were in her handes, and by thy instructions made privie to the secrets of thy glass, retourne thine answers in that very form in which thou sendest." The unhappy lovers, by the aid of this glass, exchange letters, somewhat as the Theosophists claim to do. But they are discovered and Prisceria is banished to Farmesium, a lonely and desolate spot, "the onely companie there being shepherds, who upon the vast mountaines recorded the praises of the countrie favourer, Pan, and the rurall amitie betweene them and their countrie lasses." Forbonius, however, in the disguise of a shepherd, followed the young lady, and to make a long story short, his persistent devotion was, as it deserved to be, rewarded with success, and everybody, the father included, was happy.

Here is material for a good story, but it is sadly spoiled in the telling. Lodge affects the Euphuistic style, but falls far below both Lyly and Greene in his use of it. His metaphors are weak and his antitheses halting. Moreover, like the other stories we have considered, the incidents of the tale are stifled by excessive verbiage.

"Rosalynde, Euphues' Golden Legacy," is better known than most of the Elizabethan novels from its being the source

of the plot of Shakspeare's "As You Like It." The story is interesting, however, apart from its associations. It may be classed amongst the very few Elizabethan novels which may still be read with pleasure, Although his style is still somewhat Euphuistic, Lodge far surpasses in this novel his earlier effort. The exquisite poetic setting, and the delightful romantic atmosphere which we admire so much in "As You Like It," are to be found also in "Rosalynde." The action, too, is throughout very lively. The various characters in the story are very distinctly differentiated and there is much more character-drawing than we find in the works of Lodge's contemporaries.

The next novel of interest is of a distinctly different type from any we have yet discussed. It must be remembered that Mendoza's "Lazarillo de Tormes" was translated into English in 1586. It quickly became popular amongst English readers, and did much to influence Elizabethan and later writers. The first writer of any consequence to copy the Spanish *picaresque* romance was the dramatist Nash, in "The Unfortunate Traveller." The other prose writings of this author are tracts or homilies. But "The Unfortunate Traveller" is purely fictitious. It is the story of the wanderings and adventures in France, Germany, and Italy of the unconscionable scape-grace, Jack Wilton. It is a record of practical jokes, thefts, desertions from duty, extortions, imprisonments, and intrigues. The story is told in the first person, with great effectiveness, for, though Wilton relates with much pride his various escapades and so-called misfortunes, the reader can see that Jack is always a coxcomb, and at times a villain.

With the possible exception of Dekker the humor of Nash is more keen than that of any other writer of the period. I quote, as an example, part of Jack Wilton's description of the insurrectionary forces of John of Leiden: "Perchance here and there you might see a fellow . . . that had bent a couple of yron dripping pans, armour-wise, to fence his back and his belly, another that had thrust a

payre of dry old bootes as brest plate before his belly of his doublet, because he would not be dangerously hurt; another that had twilted his trusse full of counters, thinking if the enemy should take him he should mistake them for golde, and so save his life for his money. Very devout asses they were, for all they were so dunstically set forth, and such as thought they knew as much of God's mind as richer men; why inspiration was their ordinarie familiar, and buzde in theyre eares like a Bee in a boxe evrie houre what newes from heaven, hell, and the lands of whipperginnie: displease them who durst, he should have his mittimus to damnation *ex tempore*; they would vaunt there was not a pease difference twixt them and the Apostles, they were as poore as they, of as base trades as they, and no more inspired than they, and with God there is no respect of persons."

Nash is free from the corrupting influence of Euphuism. His style is pure, and at times most vigorous and forceful. His description, too, of the torments inflicted upon a condemned criminal in Italy, whose death he witnessed, shows a power truly remarkable. For its vigor and power, this story of Nash deserves far more attention than, at the present day, seems to be accorded it. It also refutes the idea that in the Elizabethan age of dramatists no real master of prose existed. The form, too, of the tale is very excellent. It moves as steadily from beginning to end as is possible in a narrative of adventure which necessarily introduces many incidents unconnected except by the personality of the traveller.

The next noteworthy novelist is Thomas Dekker, a contemporary of Shakspeare, for he was born in 1565, but during the age of Elizabeth, which is the period we are now considering, he published no prose fiction. It was not until 1625 that he wrote the one book, which of all his writings, can properly come under this inquiry. Though this is much later than the close of Elizabeth's reign the "Raven's Al-

manac" was somewhat belated, and really belongs to the Elizabethan period.

Dekker was by no means an unprolific prose writer, but his bent of mind was rather toward the writing of pamphlets on current questions than towards fiction. In these pamphlets, however, short illustrative stories were, in many cases, inserted. This is especially true of the "*Raven's Almanac*," which differs very essentially from the fiction we have hitherto considered, in that it is not a single tale, but merely a piece of humorous writing in which tales are incorporated. These stories are told with extraordinary skill. The *Almanac* itself is an excellent piece of humorous literature, most modern in the brightness and lightness of the style. Into this so-called *Almanac* the tales are introduced naturally and effectively. They are marred by no Euphuistic tricks. If art consists in the avoidance of the non-essential, Dekker's stories, perhaps alone amongst the Elizabethan tales, are highly artistic. The last two tales especially are worthy of Boccaccio in skilfulness of narration. His best is, perhaps, that entitled: "*An Excellent Dyet for an Usurer When His Conscience is Starved*." The story is both well conceived and well told. In *Ravenpurge*, in Germany, it runs, lived Joachim Gorion, a Jewish usurer, so miserly and grasping as to be hated by all the country round. "At last it fortuneed that a farmer bordering neere unto *Ravenpurge*, being called Hans Von Limericke, having a sum of money to pay or else loose certain commodities five times worth the value, not knowing how to furnish himself with so much coine, and finding friends slacke in time of necessitie, at length called to mind this wretched usurer, Gorion," and borrowed the money from him, giving in exchange all his lands in mortgage. The farmer was ready at the hour appointed to pay the money, but the Jew, determined at all costs to gain the farm, turned back the hands of the clock, and so cheated poor Hans of his means of livelihood. Hans was soon destitute and in despair, and was about to commit suicide when he learned

that the Jew was at the point of death. Anxious for revenge, he obtained access to the bedroom of the sick man, administered to his enemy the poison he had bought for himself, and, writing a will in his own favor, signed it with the Jew's signet-ring and hid it in the now dying man's wallet. After the Jew's death the will was, of course, discovered, and, by a vote of the council, Hans was made heir of all the former's estate, 'so Hans, from a beggar, became richer than any burgomaster, and did many good deedes to the poore, thanking God that the miserable usurer had covetously gathered and had made him to be his heire, whome he never so much as once dreamt of.' "

Now, however questionable the moral of this tale, no one, I believe, who has read it, will deny that it is well told. Certainly, as a novelist, Dekker, judged by modern standards, must be rated far above most of his contemporaries.

Taking now a backward glance for a moment over the literature we have thus briefly surveyed, we confess, when we regard it from the standpoint of our more modern prejudices and more cultivated tastes, to some degree of surprise that it was accorded such popularity in its day. That the same audience should appreciate the immortal dramas of Marlowe and of Shakspeare and eagerly devour the prose of Greene and of Nash is hardly conceivable. Yet, undoubtedly, in very many cases, the stories are interesting and lively. Lack of imagination was not the weak point in Elizabethan writers, and though they wrote on foreign models, they invented, for the most part, their own matter, and many of the better stories, such as "Rosalynde" and the "Arcadia" contain the elements of true poetry. It must be admitted that the Euphuistic style affected by so many fairly smothers the thought in words. The mania for fine writing loads the narrative with a useless burden of phrases and renders it stiff and heavy. With a Euphuistic style, a "plain, unvarnished tale" is an impossibility. And yet, Euphuism is not without its charm. Doubtless, too, it has exercised a beneficent influence upon English prose.

Nor must it be forgotten that some of the novelists, such as Nash and Dekker, escaped Euphuism altogether, and developed a strong and vigorous style of their own.

Then, too, Elizabethan prose fiction is by no means totally devoid of character drawing, or of pictures of contemporary manners and customs. One example of the successful portrayal of character is to be found in the delicate discrimination made by Sidney between the characters of Pyrocles and Musidorus and between the two daughters of the King. Of the painting of manners we find a good example in "The Unfortunate Traveller" of Nash, where the court and courtiers of the time are exceedingly well described.

As to the morality of this Elizabethan fiction very much might be said. Many writers, like Lyly, thrust their moral into the foreground. But few so far freed themselves from the influence of their Italian models as to escape the charge of licentiousness. A moral purpose did not, seemingly, debar the use of the most immoral incidents. In truth, a large part of Elizabethan prose is marred by the coarseness of Rabelais and by the viciousness of Boccaccio.

The various novelists differ greatly in the art with which their stories are told. With the model of the great Florentine before them, they attain far greater success in the short story than in narratives of greater length. Greene and Lodge, in some few cases, approach their master somewhat closely in directness and simplicity of narration. In many more instances, however, they fall far short, and most of the longer stories are hopelessly involved.

Again, the subjects chosen by these writers are without lasting interest. I know of but one novel which professes to be a picture of English manners, namely, the second part of Lyly's "Euphues." Any country of the world except England is taken as the background, the more remote and unknown, the better. Since, then, the writers had no direct acquaintance with the locality chosen, the characters are either left without a background or incongruous English

elements are introduced. Sidney's tendency to plant mediæval castles and armor in the midst of Grecian forests is an instance of this. Nor does Lyly succeed better. "The Unfortunate Traveller" of Nash is one of the very few exceptions to this rule. In that book a very laudable effort is made to preserve the flavor of the various countries through which the hero passes. By most authors, however, the incidents of the tale are presented without regard to the setting or to their embellishment by the use of picturesque details—a sure sign of crudity in the art of narration.

But the gravest and most inclusive charge that can be brought against Elizabethan prose fiction is, that it is artificial and untrue to nature. The stilted conversation of the characters, if it was ever in vogue in Elizabethan times, must have been a mere passing fashion, and never widely spread. The characters, too, act according to the whim of the writer and not as persons under the same circumstances would act in real life. Evidently the Elizabethan novelists studied the human nature about them very indifferently, or at least made but little use of their observations, for their situations are often wholly impossible, and almost all their characters are soulless puppets. Men are interested in all things which relate to life as it exists. They care, too, for an ideal representation of humanity, but a picture which is, in essence, unreal and contrary to life, cannot be of permanent interest. Elizabethan prose fiction, therefore, being as a whole fundamentally untrue, could not maintain its interest.

But, while this is the case, it is going to the other extreme to condemn it indiscriminately as we have seen that Hallam did. Such men as Sidney, Lyly, Lodge, Greene, Nash, and Dekker were not likely to write as mere amateurs. We are not surprised to find that the literature we have been considering is, in many respects, vigorous and healthy. It has the true Anglo-Saxon ring. Without doubt, the superior excellence of the contemporary drama has tended to throw much undeserved discredit upon Elizabethan

prose. The more carefully we consider it, however, the more clearly do we see that its tissues are interwoven with the roots and fibres of the prose literature of the succeeding century and a half, and from these small living germs, well nigh buried though they be beneath a mass of rubbish, sprang that stout tree of English fiction whose virility and fruitfulness is still our pride.

ROBERT A. ASHWORTH.